The Reasonableness and Necessity of the Christian Faith Manifested.

IN A SERMON

Preach'd before the

Right Honourable THE Lord Mayor,

At *GUILD-HALL* Chapel,

Oct. 17. 1697.

By *JOHN HITCHCOCK*, M. A.

LONDON,
Printed by *Tho. Warren* for *Walter Kettilby* at the *Bishop's-Head* in St. *Paul's* Church-Yard, 1697.

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Heb. xi. 6. the former Part of the Verſe.

But without Faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe him.

THis Chapter is a Panegyrick upon Faith, and all its holy Champions and Martyrs, from the very beginning of the World down to the Apoſtles time. In the firſt Verſe we have a deſcription of Faith in its general Notion; *It is the ſubſtance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not ſeen:* that is, Faith is a confident expectation of thoſe good things we hope for, by vertue of a Promiſe from God; and a firm perſwaſion of the truth of thoſe things, whereof we have no ſenſible Evidence, by vertue of a Revelation from God. In the four following Verſes we have a more particular account of Faith, and how pleaſing it is to God, in ſome eminent acts and examples. And then this Propoſition is laid down as a ſtanding Maxim in Religion, which concerns every Man, and will hold true to the end of the World; *Without Faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God.*

My Diſcourſe upon this ſubject ſhall conſiſt of theſe four Parts.

I. I will explain the Nature of Religious Faith.

II. Evince the Reaſonableneſs of ſuch a Faith.

III. Shew the Neceſſity of it to render us acceptable to God.

IV. Repreſent the Power and Influence of Faith upon our Lives.

I. As to the nature of Religious Faith, it is no more than the Aſſent of the Mind to the truth of any Revealed Religion. This takes in the Revelation of God by *Moſes* to the Jews, and alſo that other by Chriſt to all the World; both which are contained in the Writings of the Old and New Teſtament.

I will ſpeak to the latter at this time, being the laſt and perfect Revelation of God's Will to Mankind, and that in which we Chriſtians are more eſpecially concerned.

And that we have all the reaſon in the World to believe this Revelation, to entertain the Chriſtian Religion in our Minds

with a firm belief of the truth of it, I shall now make appear: which was the second Thing Propoſed.

And I will only mention a few Arguments which I think are clear and convincing.

First, The whole Jewiſh Religion proves the truth of the Chriſtian. For all the Types and Prophecies relating to the Meſſias were compleatly verified and fulfilled in Chriſt: And it is impoſſible they ſhould ever be applied to any other Perſon. Which is an unanſwerable Argument for his being the Meſſias, and conſequently for the Truth of his Religion.

Secondly, The Hiſtory of our Saviour's Life and Miracles comes to us as well atteſted, and with as good Authority, as any Hiſtory in the World. It was Penned partly by ſuch as were his conſtant Companions and Eye-Witneſſes of his Actions, and partly by ſuch as had the matters of Fact from Eye-Witneſſes. And theſe were all Men of unqueſtioned Integrity: Nay they had the Teſtimony of God himſelf, the Power of working Miracles, for their Honeſty: And at laſt for a confirmation of the Truth of

what they had said, they willingly laid down their Lives.

Thirdly, The Writings of the Apostles and Evangelists were carefully preserved by the First Christians: Copies of them were faithfully taken, and Translations diligently made. And if the Tradition of the whole Church be of any weight, we are sure that we have the Writings which contain our Religion, without any Loss, or Corruption.

Fourthly, The Religion of Christ prospered in the World to the ruin of all other Religions. Neither Jews nor Gentiles, neither Learning nor Power could stop its progress: but it made its way through the strongest opposition, Conquered all the Prejudices and Interests of Mankind, and triumph'd over all the Malice, the Cunning, and Force of its Enemies. Which it could never have done, if the Providence of God had not most illustriously appeared for it, and attended the Preaching of it with an Extraordinary Blessing and Influence upon the Minds of Men.

Lastly, The Christian Religion carries the Evidence of its Divine Original in its own

own Nature and Conſtitution. For it propoſeth a Spiritual and Rational Worſhip, ſuch as is moſt agreeable to the Nature of God, and Reaſon of Man, in oppoſition to all Idolatry and uſeleſs Ceremonies. It preſcribes the beſt Rules of Life, teaches us internal Righteouſneſs and perfect Vertue, which if we practiſe, we muſt be Happy. And then it offers the ſtrongeſt Motives to the performance of our Duty, Everlaſting Rewards and Puniſhments. All this it does with the greateſt accommodation and ſimplicity, the Doctrine being framed for the uſe of all Men, is adapted to the Underſtandings of all: 'tis ſuited to all Relations, and fitted to all Capacities: No Man is left to ſeek his Duty, or a loſs to underſtand it.

What now can be more worthy of our Belief and Entertainment than this Excellent Religion? of the Truth whereof we have the higheſt Moral Evidence, the beſt Proof that the thing will bear: and it is very unreaſonable to expect any other. He that will not believe a thing that is only morally certain, and does not exclude all doubt, muſt reject all ancient Hiſtory, and

believe nothing but what he sees: which is contrary to the Judgment and Practice of Mankind. And if Sceptricks were to manage their Temporal Affairs with the same humour that they treat Religion, they would be lookt upon as Men out of their Wits, and only fit to live in a dark room by themselves.

Besides, a Faith that is grounded upon sensible Evidence, and excludes all manner of doubt, has nothing in it that is excellent or rewardable. I can see no more Vertue in such a Faith, than in believing the truth of Colours, or Mathematical Demonstrations: There is no resisting such evident Truths, and a Man cannot but believe them. Which is the reason that I do not wonder at those Mens believing in Christ, who heard him speak, and saw him act after his Divine and astonishing manner. And Christ himself seem'd to make but little account of such a Faith, when he said unto *Thomas*, Joh. 20. 29. *Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.* Intimating that such a Faith as *Thomas*'s is no more than a Mans believing his Senses,

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and deſerves no Commendation or Reward.

But ſince the Proofs of our Religion are only Moral, ſufficient to induce, but not to inforce an Aſſent: Since the things propoſed to our belief, require a diligent application and ſtudy, before we can well underſtand them our ſelves, or give a good account of them to others: This makes our Faith to be a conſiderate and free act of the Mind, and as ſuch to be praiſe-worthy and capable of reward.

We cannot give a reaſon of our Faith to others, as the Apoſtle adviſeth, unleſs we underſtand the grounds and reaſons of it our ſelves: And we cannot do this without the exerciſe of our Faculties in the examination of them; as, comparing the Quality of our Saviour's Perſon with the Character of the Meſſias delivered by the Prophets; weighing the credibility of the Apoſtles Teſtimony, and the Authority of the Church's Tradition, by which the Revelation of Chriſt was handed down to us.

Theſe and the other Arguments of our Religion muſt be duly examined, before we can be convinced of the Truth of it, and

believe it as Men. An Implicit is an irrational Faith, and a blind Assent to Religion is a contempt of Reason.

God indeed does not expect the same use of Reason, and the same degree of conviction in matters of Religion from all Men; because their Faculties and Education are both different: He considers the weakness of understanding in many, and the want of Education in more: But yet he expects that Men make use of that Reason which he has given them, and examine the Arguments, as far as they are able, which attend the Religion he has revealed. And if Men would do this with an honest Mind, and a sincere desire to know God's Will, they would see no just cause to doubt of Christianity, but would embrace it with a rational choice, and in that choice think themselves happy.

As to the offence that some take at a Poor and Crucified Saviour, I have this to say, That there is nothing in it that is unseemly, or unbecoming the Majesty of the Son of God; but that it is rather such a state, as was both necessary and suitable to the office of our Redeemer.

For the clearing whereof two things are to be considered.

1. That the Justice of God was to be satisfied for the Sins of Mankind. And that was to be done by the Death of a Divine Person in our Nature, according to the Declaration of the Divine Will. God himself foretold by his Prophets, that the Redemption of the World should be wrought by his Incarnate Son, under the Mystical Name of *Immanuel*: and that this Great Work should be effected in a way of Expiation. Christ did all that could be done to prove himself the Person design'd of old for this Office of Redeemer: He manifested his Divinity by illustrious Miracles, and the satisfaction of his Death upon the Cross by his Triumphant Resurrection.

2. It is also to be considered, that a Perfect Pattern of Vertue was to be set for the imitation of Mankind: and that must have been done in a state of Poverty and Suffering. Men are naturally more apt to live by Example, than by Rule; because Example is a visible thing, and does powerfully incline the Will through the Senses. The Beauty of Vertue is more lively and charming,

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ing in Practice, than in Idea. And therefore an Example of Conſummate Vertue was highly requiſite and uſeful to Men for the more correct Conduct of their Lives. And ſuch an Example was the Life of Chriſt: It was a Perfect Original of all Vertue. He was humble and condeſcending, though he was the Son of God: He complied with the Infirmities and Weakneſſes of Humane Nature; was meek and patient under affronts and injuries; did the greateſt Good for the greateſt Evil; reſign'd himſelf up to the diſpoſal of his Heavenly Father, and ſubmitted to his Will in every thing. All which excellent and uſeful Vertues Chriſt could not have exerciſed, if he had not lived in a mean Condition, and undergone want and pain. The Perſon of a Prince, and a Proſperous Condition, would not have ſuited the Deſign of Chriſt in giving an Example to Mankind: But by appearing under ſuch Circumſtances as he did, by being the Son of God in the form of a Servant, he was an Example to the Great and Rich, as well as to the Poor and Diſtreſſed: he practiſed the Vertues that belong to every Condition, and led every Man the way to the performance of Duty. As

As to those Doctrines, which go under the name of Mysteries, *viz.* the Doctrine of the Trinity, and of the Incarnation; why should we dislike them the worse for being Mysteries, when there is nothing in the World but what has something in it unknown to us? Nay although we could perfectly understand the natures of all Created Beings, yet the Nature of God would still remain Incomprehensible. There is an infinite distance and disproportion between his Perfections and our Faculties; and it is as impossible for us to comprehend God, as for a Bucket to contain the Ocean. It is not then a Doctrine's being above reason, but contrary to reason, that makes it unreasonable for us to believe it. All the Parts of Revelation are equally True, and an obscure Doctrine has as good Authority as a Plainer. Since therefore the Gospel discovers to us, that there are three distinct Persons in the Godhead, the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to which the Name and Attributes of God are expresly given, and also that the second Person in this Blessed Trinity did freely take our Nature that he might be our Redeemer, and so is both God and Man in one Person;

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we have the ſame reaſon and obligation to believe theſe Doctrines, as any other Doctrine in the Goſpel.

Thus much to the Reaſonableneſs of our Chriſtian Faith.

I proceed, in the third place, to ſhew the Neceſſity of this Faith to render us acceptable to God. *Without Faith it is impoſſible to pleaſe God.* Now the neceſſity of this Faith is founded in a neceſſity of the Goſpel Revelation.

And this will be made evident by clearing theſe two Points.

1. The neceſſity of a Revelation in general.

2. The Inſufficiency of all Revelation before the Goſpel for the Salvation of Mankind.

The neceſſity of a Revelation in general appears from the impoſſibility of pleaſing God, and obtaining Happineſs without one. For by Sin we loſt the Favour of God, and forfeited Immortal Life: And although we know by the Light of Nature that God muſt be Atoned, before we could be Reſtored; yet we could not from thence learn, whether God would be Atoned or not,

not, and what kind of Atonement he would accept of. This depended upon his Free Grace, and therefore could only be discover'd to us by himself. Had we continued Innocent, there would have been no need of any Revelation; for the Light of Nature was then a sure guide, both to Duty and Immortality: But by breaking the Law of our Creation, we incurr'd the Divine Displeasure, and became Mortal. And how to get out of this unhappy condition, nature could not teach us: There was no other way, but to begin again upon a New Covenant: which was wholly at the pleasure, and in the breast of God, and so was a matter of pure Revelation. Men may talk of Natural Knowledge in the business of Religion, and magnifie it as much as they think fit; but it will serve only in a state of Innocence. When Sin and Corruption take place, Natural Knowledge fails and vanishes into Ignorance. Religion in such a state must be a supernatural Thing, and supernaturally Known. Some things must then be Revealed, which could never be known by the Light of Nature; such as the

Inclination of God to forgive Sinners, and the means of appeasing his wrath, and the manner of serving and pleasing him. Other things must also be Revealed, which though knowable by the Light of Nature, yet through the Degeneracy of Mankind were almost utterly lost and extinct; such are right Notions of God and his Providence, the Principles of Morality, and Distinctions of Vertue and Vice, together with the Immortality of Humane Souls, and Another Life after This. These things are necessary to be Revealed, when the Nature of Man is Lapsed and Depraved. And if we were to take a view of the Religion and Morality of the Gentile World, we should soon be convinced, that nothing but the Light of Revelation, and the Power of Divine Grace, could ever recover them out of their dark and miserable Estate of Ignorance and Vice. Thus the necessity of some Revelation is grounded upon the Fall and Degeneracy of Mankind. For because some things were absolutely necessary to Salvation, which Men could have no natural knowledge of, as I observed and instanced

just

juſt before; therefore it was neceſſary that thoſe things ſhould be made known in a ſupernatural way, that is, by Revelation. This is a fair ſtep toward proving the neceſſity of the Revelation of the Goſpel. And it will effectually be done, if I can make good my ſecond Point; which is,

That all Revelation before the Goſpel was inſufficient for the Salvation of Mankind.

For the proof whereof I will offer but two Arguments at this time.

Firſt, All the Revelation that was before the Goſpel, was given only to the Jews, a People conſiderable at firſt for nothing but the Favour of God; who communicated his Mind to them alone, and incloſed the Religion he eſtabliſh'd within the Pale of their Church. And what was the reſt of the World the better for this narrow Revelation? What could a Revealed Religion ſignifie to thoſe, to whom it never was propounded, and for whom it was not intended? A Revelation that aims at the Happineſs of Mankind, muſt be as extenſive and univerſal as its deſign: it muſt ſhine to all

the World, and diffuse it self as far and wide as Humane Nature. But now the Religion of the Jews was to spread no farther; which is an Argument of its Insufficiency: For we cannot think that God would have confined it to That one People, if it had been fitted for the Salvation of Mankind.

Secondly, The Religion which God gave the Jews, was imperfect. I will instance only in their Worship; which had no Excellency or Usefulness any farther than as it bore a relation to Christ. *The Law made nothing perfect*; says the Author to the *Heb.* 7. 19. And so, It could not with all its Sacrifices make the Comers thereunto perfect: that is, expiate their Sins, and sanctifie their Nature. The whole Body of the Jewish Worship was meer shadow and rudiment, design'd for no more than to prefigure Christ, and train Men up for his Religion.

Besides, this Religion of the Jews was temporary, and of a limited duration. It was not framed for perpetuity, nor had it a Constitution to last always. It was to

continue.

continue no longer than till the time of Reformation; that is, till Chriſt came, who was to ſet all things right between God and Man, and finiſh a Religion that ſhould need no Amendments. Here therefore we muſt fix for Salvation. Nature, you ſee, could do nothing towards it; and Judaiſm but little: but the Goſpel wants nothing for effecting it. It aſſures us of Univerſal Redemption and Grace by Jeſus Chriſt, and tells us plainly what we muſt Believe and Do to be ſaved. And to prevent all Expectations of another Revelation, the Goſpel ſpeaks its own Perfection, and appropriates the Terms of Salvation to it ſelf.

But if Men cannot be ſaved any other way than by the Faith of the Goſpel, what will become of thoſe, who never did, nor could hear of a Meſſias before Chriſt came, nor ſince of Him? I Anſwer,

They muſt be left to the Mercy of God: for it is impoſſible to determine any thing about them. To ſay that they muſt unavoidably be Damned, reflects horribly upon the Goodneſs and Juſtice of God. To ſay that they may be ſaved without the

Faith

Faith of Christ, the Saviour of the World, is against the Word of God. To say that the Knowledge of Christ might, by a particular Revelation, be communicated to them some time before they died, is to speak by guess, and without a Warrant. It must therefore be left a secret till the Day of Judgment. But now this is as true as the Gospel it self, That whosoever rejecteth the Gospel, when it is propounded to him in a sufficient manner, shall himself be rejected at the Last Day; he cannot possibly escape the Sentence of Damnation: For this is the unalterable Decree, which Christ subjoins to the Commission he gave his Apostles, *Mar.* 16. 15, 16. *And he said unto them, Go ye into all the World, and preach the Gospel to every Creature:* And then follows the Decree, *He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.*

Thus I have explained the nature of Religious Faith in general, and proved the Reasonableness and Necessity of the Christian Faith.

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There remains but one Thing more for me to do: which is, To ſhew the Influence of Faith upon our Practice.

And for a quick diſpatch, I will conſider Faith only as it reſpects Things Future, the different States of Good and Bad Men in the other World.

And what an Operative Principle this Faith is, will appear in theſe three particulars.

1. It is the plaineſt Principle for all Men to live and act by. The innate Lovelineſs of Vertue, and its agreeableneſs with our Rational Nature; the Excellency of the Chriſtian Law, and its conduciveneſs to our well-being in this World; Theſe are very great Truths, and may be uſed as Arguments to perſwade Men to a Life of Vertue and Obedience: yet they cannot be made ſo plain to the common People, as to lye level with their low underſtandings: There is ſomething in them too Philoſophical and Fine, to be perceived by rude undiſciplined Minds. But Eternal Happineſs, and Eternal Miſery are ſuch Plain Things, that every Man has a quick apprehenſion of them, and

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is powerfully moved by them. And this is true, although Men do not rightly understand, wherein the Happiness, or Misery of the next Life does consist. For whatever the Natures of those things are, 'tis the Certainty of the Things themselves that makes the impression: and the Certainty of them is grounded upon Divine Revelation. No Man is so ignorant or stupid, as not to know what it is to be Happy, and what it is to be Miserable: for he has a natural perception and experience of those things that make him so. And therefore when the Word of God tells him, that he shall be for ever Happy, or for ever Miserable in another World, according as he has lived well, or ill in this; a firm belief of so plain a Revelation must needs have an Influence upon his Life, correspondent to his Desire of Happiness, and Dread of Misery.

2*ly*, Faith has a direct and powerful Influence upon our Practice, by being the Evidence of things not seen: not by turning invisible things into visible, but by rendring them as certain and indubitable to our understanding, and so as certain Grounds and

Principles

Principles to act by, as any thing that we see with our Eyes of Flesh. And this Faith does, It brings Heaven and Hell within the Souls view, and presents them to the Mind in so efficacious a manner, that a true Believer is as much Influenced by them, as Worldly Men are by the Objects of Sence: These Men are acted altogether by the Impressions of Sensible Things, and without looking any further, pursue a Life of Sense. And so the Man of Faith has the other World in his Eye, and by vertue of his Faith, lives not only for that World, but in it: His Conversation is already in that Heaven, which he believes and expects.

3ly and *lastly*, The Things of the other World, which Faith gives us a prospect of, are of such vast consequence, that they cannot but have a mighty force upon us. All the Pleasures and Pains of this Life are inconsiderable when compared with those of the next. Heaven and Hell have nothing in them that is Little: In those Places are fulness of Joy, and extremity of Pain, and both Everlasting. And who can think of these things without the greatest Concern?

Or how is it possible for a Man to believe them heartily, and yet take no care to please that God, in whose Power it is to determine his Everlasting State? 'tis for want of this Faith that Men live without concern or care for hereafter: For as nothing can be compared with Heaven and Hell, so nothing can affect us like them.

In short, A true Faith is the only sure Principle of a Good Life. No Temporal interest or consideration is great enough to secure our Vertue. But Eternity adds such a weight both to Happiness and Misery, that nothing can more firmly engage us in the Fear and Service of God, than the Belief of it. Under the Influence whereof we cannot Live amiss: And *without* this *Faith 'tis impossible* to Live so as *to Please God.*

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